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FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9423
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000638

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND INR/AA
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [ER](#) [DJ](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI-ERITREA: SEPARATE UN AND ACP
FACT-FINDING MISSIONS EXAMINE BORDER DISPUTE

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 632 (AND PREVIOUS) (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. DJIBOUTI 482

Classified By: ERIC WONG, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In response to Djibouti's appeal to the international community, the United Nations Secretariat and the Brussels-based African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP Group) have dispatched separate fact-finding missions to examine ways to reduce tensions with Eritrea, following June 10-11 hostilities at the disputed Ras Doumeira border area near the strategic Bab-al-Mandeb strait. Both missions expressed frustration at Asmara's refusal to allow them to visit Eritrea, and highlighted the difficulty of reversing a military "fait accompli" that favors Eritrea. Visiting Djiboutian troop positions approximately 15 km south of the border with Eritrea, UN officials observed that continued Djiboutian deployment was "not sustainable," and suggested that a multinational force may be needed. Separately, ACP representatives noted that the participation of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti in ACP meetings could make Brussels a possible forum for confidence-building measures involving Eritrea. One possible role for UN agencies is to seek to resettle Eritrean defectors and repatriate prisoners of war, in order to defuse the possibility of these issues becoming future flashpoints. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On August 3, Charge and Emboffs met with the UN Secretariat fact-finding mission visiting Djibouti August 1-4 to examine the border conflict between Djibouti and Eritrea (refs A-B). The UN delegation included: Sam Bassey Ibok, Deputy Director, Africa II Division, UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA); Arnaud Huannou, Desk Officer, Africa I Division, DPA; LTC Douglas Langrehr, Planning Officer, Military Planning Service, UN DPKO; and Laurent Dufour, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UNOCHA, Nairobi. The team planned to travel to Addis Ababa on August 4 for meetings with AU and Ethiopian officials, including with Ethiopian CHOD General Samora Yunis.

ERITREA: REJECTS UN AND OTHER DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

[1](#)3. (C) Ibok said the "multi-faceted" UN delegation sought a comprehensive review of the situation between Eritrea and Djibouti: military, political, and humanitarian. The border conflict between the two countries could not be allowed to "fester as a fait accompli," as it potentially threatened not only economic development in Djibouti but also international maritime interests. Desired outcomes included: ensuring

that neither country turned to war; seeking a return to pre-June 10 positions along the border (i.e., a withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ras Doumeira peninsula); and a political solution, possibly submission of both parties to a "judicial process." Ibok said he envisioned a "phased process," beginning with confidence-building measures and humanitarian activities.

¶4. (C) At the same time, Ibok said, there was a "convergence" of opinion among various actors that it was extremely difficult to engage the Government of State of Eritrea (GSE) effectively. As it had with previous delegations (including those from the Arab League and the African Union), the GSE had rebuffed the UN team's attempt to visit Asmara. However, the UN team had met with AU and Arab League officials, as well as authorities in Ethiopia and Djibouti. Ibok said it was important not/not to follow the pattern of UN actions that had failed to address Eritrea-Ethiopia border tensions, and which had culminated in the withdrawal of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). Identifying a way to show the GSE that its action had been "unacceptable" was difficult; one possibility discussed, Ibok said, was a binding UNSC resolution that would impose sanctions on Eritrea if it did not withdraw.

ERITREAN MOTIVES UNCLEAR

¶5. (C) UN poloff Huannou observed that whereas Eritrea's incursion into Djiboutian territory to construct fortified

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trenches (ref B) was likely directed by the GSE "at the highest level," the June 10-11 outbreak of hostilities--initiated by Eritrean troops firing at their own deserter/defectors fleeing to Djibouti--was probably "an accident." He noted that those Eritreans initially present at Ras Doumeira were civilian engineers, followed in mid-April by Eritrean troops.

¶6. (C) The UN officials observed that Eritrea's motive in building military fortifications and deploying troops at Ras Doumeira were unclear.

-- DPKO LTC Langrehr questioned Eritrea's rationale in building an ostensibly defensive position whose rear faced the sea. The GSE may have considered Ras Doumeira a potential "back door" that could have been used by troops from landlocked Ethiopia to advance to the port of Assab, he added.

-- Langrehr agreed that the sophistication of rock-lined trenches on Ras Doumeira peninsula required several months to construct, which suggested that Eritrea's military fortifications preceded Djibouti's taking an active political role in Somali peace talks. (NOTE: In May, Djibouti hosted the first of two rounds of talks involving the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) majority led by Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed--which is opposed to the more extremist ARS faction based in Asmara led by al-Qaida-associated Hassan Dahir Aweys. Some analysts have therefore speculated that Eritrea's aggression at Ras Doumeira aimed at derailing Djibouti's role in these UN SRSG-backed Somali talks. END NOTE.)

-- Another possible motive was disrupting recently announced plans by Tarek Bin Laden to build a USD 150-200 billion bridge linking two new cities to be constructed over 40 years, in Djibouti and Yemen (septel), as the construction site on the Djiboutian side was near Moulhoule (the Djiboutian military base, approximately 15 km south of Ras Doumeira).

CONTINUED DJIBOUTIAN DEPLOYMENT ALONG BORDER "NOT SUSTAINABLE"

¶7. (C) In Djibouti, the delegation had met with the UN

country team and Djiboutian officials, and had visited Moulhoule, Ibok said. According to Djiboutian officials, some 19 Djiboutian troops remained unaccounted for, possibly including a colonel. (NOTE: While the GODJ has not released official casualty totals, Djiboutian state-run media highlighted President Guelleh's participation in a July 27 ceremony to construct 44 residences for families of fallen Djiboutian troops killed in June 10-11 fighting with Eritrea. END NOTE.) From the visit to Djiboutian positions at Moulhoule, it was clear that Djibouti's large-scale mobilization was "not sustainable," Ibok added, raising the question of whether "multinational forces" in Djibouti were capable of monitoring the Djibouti-Eritrea border. Emboffs responded that while Djibouti hosted the only U.S. military base in Africa, troops from the U.S. CENTCOM Combined Joint Task Forces-Horn of Africa (CJTTF-HOA) at Djibouti's Camp Lemonier lacked the capabilities, assets, or mandate to serve as MILOBs, as they were primarily engaged in civil affairs and humanitarian projects.

BRUSSELS-BASED ACP COULD BE FORUM FOR ER-ET-DJ TALKS

18. (U) Separately, Charge and Emboffs met on July 28 with a four-person fact-finding mission representing the Brussels-based Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP Group). Niger PermRep to the EU Abdou Abarry led the ACP mission visiting Djibouti July 27-29, which also included Gabonese Ambassador Rene Makongo, Rwandan Ambassador Joseph Bonesha, and ACP Secretariat political expert Mahamane Aoudou Cisse. The ACP group was visiting at the invitation of the GODJ, and had met with President Guelleh, as well as with Djibouti's foreign, prime, and defense ministers.

19. (C) Amb. Abarry observed that the military situation at the border was now a "fait accompli," with Eritrean troops occupying Ras Doumeira peninsula. There could be no solution

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without a demilitarization of the disputed area, he said. The GSE's silence was a problem; Djibouti's foreign minister had reported that Eritrea had refused to participate in any political talks. However, as ambassadors from both Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Djibouti participated in ACP meetings in Brussels, perhaps the 19-member ACP could serve as a useful forum for confidence-building measures with Eritrea, Abarry said. Abarry also noted that EU development commissioner Louis Michel was among those few senior officials who could meet with GSE principals.

110. (C) COMMENT. Failure to resolve longstanding border tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia--despite active engagement by the international community, a jointly established arbitration process, and a large UN peacekeeping mission--augurs the poor prospects of reversing Eritrea's occupation of Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira, in the absence of any stronger sanctions imposed on Eritrea. As we have emphasized with both the UN and ACP fact-finding teams, however, the international community--particularly UN humanitarian agencies--can play a constructive role in resettling defector/deserters and/or repatriating prisoners of war, as well as fostering other confidence-building measures. Military representatives of Eritrea and Djibouti, for example, could meet under UN auspices--much as Eritrean and Ethiopian officers did under UNMEE's Military Coordination Commission from 2000-2006. END COMMENT.
WONG